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## THE BIBLE.

OF all the books in the world there is none that has exercised a greater influence than the Bible. Considered from a purely secular standpoint, the Bible is a most wonderful piece of literature, which surpasses in importance anything that has elsewhere been produced. In addition to this purely historical statement of fact, we must grant that the Bible contains sayings of deep wisdom, of wonderful inspiration, of comfort in trials and tribulation, and is at the same time a collection of the most valuable records obtainable of the evolution of religion.

Considering the paramount importance of the Bible, it is not at all to be wondered at that some of its admirers should have developed the theory of its divine origin and authorship, and set it apart as a holy book, which has become the religious text-book of nations; and its very letters have been deemed too sacred to be tampered with or criticised. It was esteemed so much above all human wisdom that it became the foundation-stone of the religion of numerous Jewish and Christian sects, and is still regarded by many with a religious awe, as being literally the word of God, and the sole expression of divine revelation.

We all know the powerful influence which the Bible has exercised upon the world of *belles lettres*. We know how many great men educated themselves by reading the Bible, by taking it as a model for forming their thoughts and literary style. How deeply was a broad yet decidedly worldly man like Goethe affected by both the Old and the New Testament; how glowingly wrote a man of natural science like Humboldt of the poetry of the Psalms; and

how many traces did the legal principles of the Old Testament leave on the legislation of England.

No doubt the Bible is a book of extraordinary significance and peculiar strength. Yet the exaggerated pretensions of its religious admirers are apt to offset all its beauty and grandeur, and have actually exposed the Bible to a ridicule which is unjustified if it be regarded from the purely secular standpoint. But if the Bible were indeed in a specific sense "the word of God"; if its origin were due to a special revelation actually indited by the Holy Spirit; if the Bible as a whole were actually a systematic unity which has originated somehow as a product of divine providence; and if the real author (or as it were, the real editor-in-chief) were God himself, who simply utilised the pens of a number of Jewish priests and prophets as a writer of modern date would use stenographers and typewriters, or as a minister of state proclaims the principles of his policy through the reporters of the government press: the Bible would not only lose the prestige which it deserves, but would be degraded into a piece of patch-work of the most abominable and undignified character, tending to render religion ridiculous and to throw Christianity back to the level of pre-Christian Paganism.

I must confess that I myself passed in my childhood through a phase of Christian belief to which a literal acceptance of the Bible as the word of God seemed indispensable, and I have surrendered this conception of Christianity only after a hard struggle in which I passed through successive stages which finally landed me at the ultimate consistent result of criticism in the negation of all religious truth. I have regained a religious ground only through radically abandoning all untenable positions and allowing criticism to have its own way, giving to science what belongs to science, without reserve or without fearing any one of its incidental resultants, and by grounding my world-conception upon the immediate facts of experience, that is to say, upon life itself, upon the wants of the human heart, its hopes and fears, its wrongs and redresses, its sufferings and consolations; further upon a consideration of the conditions under which man originates, the factors which shape his destiny, the aim toward which the evolution of life tends, and the signifi-

cance that can be discovered in life. The richest source consists in the interrelations of human society, with their demands, their sorrows and joys, and especially the duties of life with all that they imply. The complicated world of our surroundings exhibits to the thinking man a definite order, which shapes all things and us too, which dominates life as an ultimate authority for our conduct. It is a power that we must heed,—a power which, however, is not a power in the mechanical sense, an energy to be measured in foot pounds by the resistance which it affords, but an irresistible norm that dominates all existence. This power is a norm analogous to natural law, and indeed, all natural laws are expressions of this norm. Yet this norm is not a law in a legal sense; it is neither a law made by a legislature nor ordained by a monarch; it is like a mathematical formula, a rule, or principle, or uniformity, which applies to anything and everything that exists, and which permeates the world of reality as what has been called the logic of facts.

This view offers a new God-conception, which is neither the old monotheism nor the old pantheism, yet preserves the truths of both views in what may be called “*nomotheism*,” i. e., the conception of God as the norm of existence.

Here we have a God-conception in which the basic argument of atheism has become the head of the corner. This God is at one with science. He is spiritual in the philosophical, not the spiritualistic sense of the word spirit. He is as spiritual as, or rather more so than, thoughts are spiritual, for he is the prototype of thinking and the ultimate norm of correct thought. He is at the same time as real as the mathematical verities, i. e., the objective factors described in mathematical truths; for they are the conditions which determine the course of events and are the creators of the universe. This God is not an individual being, but the All-being; not a creature of supermundane size and importance, but truly God. Not a particular entity, but omnipresence itself, and eternality itself, and universality itself. Yet while he is not a particular individual, he is yet possessed of a definite character, not indeterminate but transcendently and most exceedingly determinate. Far from being existence in general and indefinite, he is the

principle of all determination. He is not vague and nondescript but a system of infinite but well-defined or definable conditions, a spiritual body of normative truths, a superpersonal personality whose differentiated organs are not corporeal limbs, but eternal verities, and whose will manifests itself as the constitution of existence, as the cosmic order of the universe, as the standard of right and wrong for the conscience of man.

It is not my intention here to dwell on the details as to the omnipresence of the normative principle of the world, nor to explain it in its philosophical significance; nor to point out its intrinsic necessity, as which it represents itself in mathematics; be it sufficient to state that it exists, and that when I recognised its religious significance I felt I had found the real ground of all religious sentiment, and had discovered in it the key that will unlock the mystery of the evolution of religion. We can now regard religion on a level with all other human institutions as a phenomenon of human life, and understand why it naturally and necessarily passed through successive phases, through animism and fetishism, through the period of myth and mysticism, through polytheism and monotheism, through dogmatism and rationalism, always representing the personal relation of man to the norm of existence until it is reduced to a sober scientific conception of the world, in which the facts of our religious life are rightly interpreted.

It is natural that every progress in the evolution of religion appears as a breakdown, and the fact is that as a rule something valuable has to be surrendered for the sake of something more valuable. The surrender of mythology for the sake of a more soberly constructed dogmatology is a sacrifice of the human mind about which we are no longer fit to judge; but the Greek Pagan unquestionably felt the loss of his poetical world-conception as a serious deprivation of the beauty of life, and of all that makes life worth living. In the same way, the surrender of our traditional dogmatism will not come about without a hard struggle on the part of those who hold it; they understand the truth of their position, and deeming that which is relatively true to be absolutely true can see only decay in the rise of a new and broader religious concep-

tion. But when they have gone through the valley of darkness, their souls will be none the less purified in the refining furnace of doubting and searching, and they will reach a higher and nobler stage of the conception of their religion. They will find that the facts of religious life have remained the same, while the interpretation only has changed. Many things which they formerly deemed essential will become incidental, yet their vision will be clearer and their outlook into the past as well as into the future more comprehensive.

Religious life is reflected in religious literature; and thus our attitude toward the Bible is characteristic of the breadth of comprehension we have attained. The deification of the Sacred Scriptures, their exaltation as Holy Writ, characterises the stage of dogmatism; and we must therefore expect that every one who is still under the ban of a literal belief in the dogma as absolute truth will naturally look upon the Bible as a literally inspired book, for the redaction of which God himself is ultimately responsible. Men of this type accept the Bible as absolute authority, because to them it is divine revelation pure and simple. They deem it wrong and irreligious to exercise criticism, and place the Bible above their own thinking as the norm of all truth.

According to the dogmatist, the Bible, being the word of God, contains the truth and nothing but the truth; from a purely secular standpoint the Bible may be regarded as the word of God in so far as its statements are found to contain scientific or moral truths. Taking this position, we claim truth and divinity to be interchangeable ideas, the former being a philosophical, the latter a religious, term for one and the same thing. The gems of truth in the Bible are not more divine from having been endorsed by the majority of the delegates assembled at Nice, in 325, and ten ecumenical councils could not by declarations of its infallibility as canonical writings cleanse it of its errors and shortcomings. On the other hand, the truth of other books, of Shakespeare and Goethe, of Kant and Darwin, of Euclid and Gauss (in so far as it has any bearing on man's moral conduct), is not less holy nor more profane than any truth recorded in the Bible.

The Bible as an entirety is not a consistent whole, but a collection of many books of different character and value and written from divergent standpoints. It cannot directly but only indirectly be called a revelation of God. It is, to use a now common French word, the *dossier* of the religious evolution of the people of Israel. It is a batch of records, a collection of documentary evidences gathered in an important phase of the religious development of the world when monotheism was for the first time firmly established and its advocates had just gotten a glimpse of the universality and cosmic significance of religion.

If the Bible be a collection of records, the truth of its various statements cannot be absolute but consists mainly in being a faithful mirror of their times. From this standpoint the religions which are based upon the Old and the New Testament cease to be pledged to the letter of the Bible, and its representatives gain for themselves the liberty of free inquiry.

These general remarks are of importance in the present question, because the principles involved have a direct bearing upon the problem of the Bible and divine revelation. A change in our conception of God will necessarily show the records of revelation in a new light.

From my standpoint it has become an impossibility to believe that God, the Most High, should bodily appear at Abraham's tent and deign to partake of a meal; and I find it difficult to find any divine significance in the words which the strangers utter, who are first three persons and then addressed as one and spoken of as "the Lord" (Gen. xviii. 2 and 3). With all due deference to Prof. W. Henry Green, for whose theology and other accomplishments as a religious leader I have an unbounded respect, I must fall back upon the theory that these and similar passages are instances of anthropomorphism, relics of Paganism which have escaped the censorship of the monotheistic redactor of the Old Testament. Notice, too, that (in Chapter xv. 18) God promises to give to Abraham and his seed the land from the Nile to the Euphrates, with all the inhabitants thereof, of which territory Palestine is only a small portion.

While the Lord is quite affable and convivial in Abraham's tent, there are other passages where the writer's anthropomorphism is less pleasant. We read, for instance, of Moses that he fled from Egypt and lived in Midan where he married Zipporah, the daughter of the priest of Midan, and she bore him a son called Gershen who had not been circumcised in the tents of the Midianites. When Moses returned to Egypt he took his family along, and the following curious incident happened to Moses on the way. We read in Exodus iv. 24-26 :

"And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him [Moses] and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he [the Lord] let him [Moses] go : then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision."

Only think of the scene as real and depict the Lord as playing this undignified part, and who can say that he believes it? I for one give it up and prefer to regard the passage as a crude piece of anthropomorphism.<sup>1</sup>

Three millenniums ago the conviction prevailed that a God who by prayer or offerings could not be prevailed upon to give rain was a useless institution ; to-day we no longer pray for a change of weather but rely on natural law and substitute methods of irrigation for the conjuration of special divine intercession. There may be professors of theology who still in theory hold the old view of God, but there is none who would act according to it in real life. I confess freely that I no longer believe in miracles. I do not deny that many miraculous things happen, but there are no miracles in the sense of a special divine intercession. If they

<sup>1</sup> If circumcision be indeed a divine institution which was personally advocated by the Lord (Genesis xvii. 11-12), and by his bodily appearance insisted on with threats of assault, why is it no longer practised to-day by Christianity ? The Gentile church has dropped it for good reasons and we know now that it has been from time immemorial, and is still, practised by many savage tribes in the interior of Africa and America. That it was a distinction in Egypt for the priesthood may have influenced the Israelites to adopt the practice, but need not prevent us to-day from branding it as a barbarous rite which is at once indecent as it is bloody and brutal. I cannot help expressing the wish that our Jewish fellow citizens would abolish this useless mutilation or at least treat it as an unessential part of their religion.



ever happened, why do they no longer happen to-day? In the Old Testament God was a miracle-worker who took pride in showing off his power over the forces of nature. Either God has changed his character, or his prophets have changed their conception of God, for, at any rate, no faithful believer to-day would attempt to prove the existence of God after the manner of Elijah.

There was a question in the days of Elijah, as to whether Baal or Yahveh was God, and the prophet, who stood accused of having made himself offensive to Ahab the King, proposed to decide the problem as follows. He said to the King, 1 Kings xviii.:

"I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.

"Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."

Having gathered the people together on Mount Carmel, Elijah proposes a prayer-test in miracle-working and comes out victor. We read:

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

"Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

"Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

If God be truly the same for ever more, why does he no longer have prophets who work miracles? But the truth is that God's handiwork appears in the order of nature and does not manifest itself in its exceptions. What would we say to a prophet to-day, a rabbi, or a bishop, or a protestant doctor of divinity, who would propose a public prayer-test and thus prove that Jehovah and not Allah or Brahma or Shang Ti is God. We would laugh at him; some would go out of sheer curiosity, but no one would take him seriously. If we were to read the story as having happened to-

day, and if otherwise creditable witnesses testified to its truth, we would not believe it, but deem it more proper to investigate into the mental condition of the witnesses. But since it is supposed to have happened almost three thousand years ago we are expected to accept it and believe the story and find no further difficulty.

But the internal improbability, not to say impossibility, of the story, which, whatever may be the historical kernel, marks it as a legend, is not all. The farce becomes a tragedy. The story continues:

“And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.”

We may assume that the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal were criminals who deserved death for crimes which the present report omits to mention. But such an assumption is not warranted by the context. They are put to death ostensibly on no other ground than being the priests of a false God. Any religion to-day that would propose to follow the example of Elijah will have to be suppressed by our government authorities. There are instances of Indian rain-makers, zealous for their religion and pure in their intentions, who having by some extraordinary coincidences proved successful, proceeded to have all rival medicine-men slain. And while we abhor their deeds as those of assassins, Elijah is called a prophet of God. All the traditional interpretations which will make us believe that in the days of Elijah extra severe measures were needed, are artificial. We might as well believe that the whole order of nature including the present contrast of right and wrong was different in the time of the Old Testament. But while we might grant, for controversy's sake, that people lived to an abnormally great age, one hundred and seventy-five years and even nine hundred years, we do not grant that what is wrong to-day was right of yore. On the same ground the horrors of the Inquisition and the burning of poor Servetus could be most easily justified.

Elisha, the disciple of Elijah, anoints Jehu, a captain of Ahab's guards and a zealous believer in Yahveh, as King over Israel and commands him in the name of the Lord “to smite the house of

Ahab, his master." And Jehu succeeds by treason and treachery which is related in the Bible, not only without any rebuke, but even with praise and not without a certain satisfaction. Suppose Ahab and his house had deserved death, was it right for the rebel king to have the children of his former master slain after they had surrendered; and if the priests of Baal were villains, indeed, was it worthy of a worshipper of the true God to kill them by an act of treachery? We read in 2 Kings x. 18-28:

"And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much.

"Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.

"And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it

"And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to another.

"And he said unto him that was over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments.

"And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord, but the worshippers of Baal only.

"And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him.

"And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal.

"And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them.

"And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day.

"Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

The Night of Saint Bartholomew was not worse than this.

Jehu is blamed for keeping up the worship of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan which were set up for the ten tribes in competition with the temple-worship at Jerusalem, but his atrocities and

his treachery receive the unqualified praise of the Lord. We read (v. 30) :

"And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."

If anything is clear to the student of the Bible it is this, that our views of God, though they have developed under the influence of Biblical theology and though we grant them to have directly descended from the Israelitic God-conception, have been considerably purified during these latter centuries through scientific training and by philosophical considerations.

David is a man of God in the national consciousness of the Jews, but not if he is measured by the standard of morality to-day. He is not only not a man of God but acts sometimes like a villain, and the redeeming features of his character consist in the circumstance which is no merit of his that his contemporaries were not a whit better, but most of them worse and less energetic, than he was. His crimes and various offences are bluntly stated in the Bible because the authors of that age did not see great wrong in his deeds and looked upon his lecherous and treacherous ways as excusable foibles. The story of Bathsheba is the best known but not the worst act of his life, and it has the redeeming feature in being branded as wrong by Nathan the prophet. The last deeds of his life are as infamous as any perjury in profane history and are mentioned without a word of censure.<sup>1</sup> David ordered his faithful servant Joab to be slain for crimes which David ought to have punished at once by a regular court martial, when they were committed, and not many years afterwards by the irregular proceeding of having him assassinated. In addition he had promised to spare the life of Shimei, one of his political enemies, but now on his death-bed David enjoins his assassination on his son and

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<sup>1</sup> We read in 1 Kings xv. 5 : "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

successor, Solomon, saying, "his hoar head bring thou down with blood." These were David's last words recorded in the Bible.

The indecency of Biblical speech is not a calling of things by their right names, at least not in the great majority of cases ; it is simply characteristic of the vulgarity of a pristine age. As such it is quite excusable if the Bible is of human origin, but not if it is the word of God.

If we take for granted that the Bible is absolutely true, we are still confronted with its undignified conception of God ; for the God of Elijah and the God of David are no longer our God ; and the way in which they ascertain the will of God is based upon the superstitions of bygone ages. One more instance will be sufficient. We read in 2 Samuel xxi. :

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year ; and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.

"Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you ? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord ?

"And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel,

"Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose. And the king said I will give them."

This is David's dispensation of justice which according to the Biblical record is done in response to an inquiry of the Lord. Can we really assume that this answer, which led David to commit a most atrocious iniquity, actually came from God ? The probability is that this inquiry was made through the Urim and Thummin, and that it was on a plane with casting the lot,—both of which, with all due reverence for the belief of ancient theology that is still holding its own in our midst, we must reject as superstitious practices. Let any one who would dare to defend the theory that such was in those days God's method of making special revelations, declare frankly whether he would countenance the outcome of it in the present case, which ended in the brutal lynching of seven men

of the house of Saul, through a weakness or a superstitious foible of David. We read 2 Samuel xxi, 9 :

"And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord : and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest."

The only explanation from the old standpoint of uncritical belief is the thought that the ways of God are inexplicable. What would we think of a king who to-day would act like David, and what of a religion whose oracles would lead to such deeds !

The instances of Elijah and David are not isolated exceptions, but typical cases of the average morality that prevails among the great men of the Old Testament. The general tenor of their religious convictions is the ordinary golden mean and does not yet touch the low watermark of human sacrifices as in Jephtha and Hiel, the second founder and rebuilder of Jericho, or the justification of fraud toward strangers.

When Jericho was destroyed at the special command of God, all its inhabitants were slain, "both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass," with the sole exception of Rahab, a disreputable woman who had betrayed the city into the hands of the enemies of her countrymen. And Joshua adjured the people, saying (Joshua vi. 26):

"Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho : he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first born and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."

Jericho, however, was sure to be rebuilt sooner or later, for, being the key to Palestine, and commanding the entrance into the country from the desert routes, it was too important both for commercial and strategic purposes to be left in ruins ; and the man who undertook the work was still superstitious and savage enough to mind Joshua's curse : we read in the first Book of Kings, with reference to the reign of Ahab (Chap. xvi. 34) :

"In his days, Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho ; he laid the foundation stones thereof in Abiram, his first born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segub, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun."

The Bible does not condemn Hiel the Bethelite for his superstition; it simply tells the facts and makes the dry statement that this awful deed was done "according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke to Joshua, the son of Nun." Is that indeed the word of God which can be used to give support to the most barbarous relics of the age of savage life? If God really made his will known by direct intercession, why did he not give Jephtha a warning that he did not want human sacrifices, and why did he not send a prophet to the brave hero to release him from the rash vow that pledged him to offer up his own daughter for a burnt-offering?<sup>1</sup>

The Bible contains most noble sentiments, but on the other hand it is not free from superstitious notions of folklore interest. Let us therefore bear in mind that it is not a direct utterance of the word of God, but a record of the history of religion. The terrible witch prosecutions of the Middle Ages have their root in such passages of the Old Testament as these, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." (Ex. xxii. 18.)<sup>2</sup> If the Bible was really written under the special dispensation of God, why were expressions like these used, which, as God in his omniscience ought to have foreseen, would cost many, many thousands of innocent lives?

We want a God who is straightforward and loves clean hearts and clean hands, not one who connives at surreptitious tricks and vile practices for the sake of petty gains, and must give his special commands in whispers. We read in Ex. xi. 2 and xii. 36:

"And the Lord said unto Moses . . .

"Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver and jewels of gold.

"And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians."

The traditional explanation of this passage is that the Egyptians had used the Israelites as slaves, and that a special provision had become necessary to make them receive payment for their

<sup>1</sup> The story is told in Judges xi. 30-40.

<sup>2</sup> Similar passages are Lev. xx. 6; Lev. xx. 27, and others.

labor, which was done in this way. The same logic would justify any theft or fraud, and is it worthy of God to balance the debit and credit of his people by meeting suppression with fraud? It is natural that suppression should be met by fraud, and it is further a psychological fact that the suppressed will try to excuse their practices on religious grounds as being entitled to a reparation of some kind and acting on the special permission or even command of God. But for that reason we do not believe—even though the statement was made by the Bible that God advised the Israelites to spoil the Egyptians. No! That is not the God of mankind to-day. The Omnipotent would have had an open reckoning, and would have scorned to balance the wrongs of his people by stealth.

The statement just quoted in Exodus is a record of the God-conception of a down-trodden nation but does not record a word of God himself. If we have to accept the old view as the only conception of the Bible that is tenable, we had better abandon religion and turn infidels; for the Bible, being a collection of religious records, contains barbarisms and aberrations which we hope to have outgrown for good. This is true of the Old Testament as well as of the New Testament. Both contain wheat and tares, both have grown and brought forth fruit, both have been tried and the tares have been gradually discarded. Let us openly confess that Christianity to-day is no longer the Christianity of the Apostolic age with its superstitious fear of the day of judgment and the eager hope of healing diseases by faith. The Christian Church no longer attempts to cast out devils or to lay hands on the sick for the purpose of curing them. The words which Jesus is reported to have spoken before "he was received up into heaven" are only partly remembered—so far as they still agree with present Christianity—and partly forgotten. We read in Mark xvi. 15-18:

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues.



"They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

If this be Christianity, then the present Christianity is bare of the signs and it is a spurious Christianity.

St. Paul confidently expected that he himself would see the day of the Lord, and having explained in his first epistle to the Corinthians the significance of the events in Jewish history and the punishment of sinners, he adds:

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. x. 2.)

When some of the Thessalonian Christians died, he comforted the survivors by declaring that those who sleep will be resurrected and taken together up to heaven with those who survive. And the words of Paul expressly imply that he himself, together with the Thessalonians whom he addresses, will remain, of which fact he is so sure as to pronounce his opinion as being an utterance of "the word of the Lord." He says (1 Thes. iv. 13-18):

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Shall we resort here to the interpretation that St. Paul means by "us, upon whom the ends of the world are come" the uncounted thousands of generations from his time to doomsday? If he did mean it, he certainly used words which could not but be misunderstood by the people whom he addressed. The context speaks plainly against it and St. Paul evidently repeats the words "we which are alive and remain" to give emphasis to this hope which he proclaims unto his followers "by the word of the Lord." There

is only one way of explaining these passages without doing violence to the sense of the words, which is that St. Paul has misunderstood the Lord when he communicated to him the secret concerning the end of the world.

The best way out of the difficulty is a frank confession that St. Paul was mistaken, and that he was in the habit of proclaiming those deep convictions of his which he could not prove by reasoning, as words of the Lord. His epistles are documents of great importance, giving evidence of the development of Christianity during the Apostolic age in its spread over the Gentile world, but we cannot regard them as a direct revelation of God which we could quote as authority on mooted subjects.

With all due reverence to St. Paul as a saint and an apostle, we must insist that he is as much subject to error as are we to-day, and it was a symptom of the inroads of Paganism into Christianity when Church councils declared his epistles or any other books to be the infallible word of God.

The Gospel writers are no exception to the rule and even the sayings of Christ should not be blindly accepted as utterances of truth. One instance that refers to the same subject of the coming of the Son of Man, will be sufficient. We read in Mark ix. 1 :

" And he (Jesus) said unto them : ' Verily I say unto you that there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.' "

That in this passage the second advent of Christ is referred to there can be no doubt, and, certainly, readers in the early days of Christianity understood such prophecies in this sense. A parallel passage in Matthew which is more explicit may be worth quoting in full :

" For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

" For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

" Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken :

" And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven : and then shall

all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree ; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh :

"So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (Matt. xxiv. 27-34.)

The common interpretation of this passage is that Jesus mixes up two events, the destruction of Jerusalem and the day of judgment ; but the words "immediately after the tribulation of those days" cannot be disputed away ; and further the statement is unequivocal, and affirmed by a strong asseveration "verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till *all* these things be fulfilled." But if we accept the theory that Christ confused two different events in referring to a subject that was of an awful and personal significance to the people whom he addressed, how can we place any reliance on other words of his?

There is in my opinion no way out of it but by abandoning the old Pagan worship of the letter of the Scriptures as Holy Writ. The Bible is the word of God in the same sense as all scriptures that contain truth are the word of God. The Bible is more important than other books because it covers a period of the religious evolution of mankind which is of paramount importance, but for that reason, the Bible is neither free from error nor in any sense an absolute authority in matters of truth. I have arrived at this conclusion after long and careful deliberation, and if I should be mistaken I shall gladly go over the whole field again to correct my errors. I am willing to retrace my steps or alter my views if truth can be proved to be against me.

As to Bible criticism I wish to state that far from being unholy it is a product of piety and religious conscience. The work is not carried on by infidels or antagonists of the Christian faith, but by deeply religious and conscientious men who are moved by a love of truth, and thus can be rightly said to be guided by the Holy

Spirit. Professor Cornill, for instance, is not a negative spirit, but a fervid Christian believer. He is a Huguenot (i. e., a Presbyterian) whose ancestors fled from France on account of their faith and found an asylum among the German Lutherans. How strong his adhesion to the faith of Calvin is, appears from a statement he made in 1896 before the fourth West Prussian Provincial Synod<sup>1</sup>:

"As a genuine old Huguenot, in my whole church feeling and consciousness I belong to the strict Reformed Confession. If there were in this synod a group of the Reformed Church, I should have felt constrained to ally myself with it, and should have done so as flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone."

In conclusion I sum up: The Bible if treated as a secular book on the same level with other books is great and divine; but the moment it is literally or in any special sense proclaimed as the word of God, it becomes an idol full of ugliness and abomination.

God is not like the Pagan gods of ancient mythologies; he speaks to us in a spiritual way by the experiences we make in life and in the truths which we learn. We can fairly abandon the Pagan conception of God for the nobler and more philosophical view that God is spirit and love and light.

But let us be serious about our God-conception; let us cease to halt between two opinions, and if we surrender Baal, let us surrender all that savors of Baal service, though it may go under the name of Yahveh or Elohim or Christ. Let us be children of the light, and children of the day; not children of the night nor of the darkness.

God is not the darkness of the world, but the eternal light: He is the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And the light of God comes to us in the regular order of evolution, finding its highest intellectual expression in a scientific world-conception and its moral actualisation in the religion of love and good-will.

We had a moral reform of Church-life in the Reformation; what we need now most urgently is an intellectual reform, a re-

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<sup>1</sup> The speech "Science in Theology" was published in full in *The Open Court*. Vol. XI., pp. 35-42. As to the occasion which elicited it and for further details see *ibid.* the footnote on page 35.

form that will restore sincerity of heart and honesty in matters of thought. I do not advocate the undoing of the work of the past or the belittling and tearing down of its results; on the contrary, I propose to complete the work, to be serious in questions of fundamental importance, to investigate the philosophical foundation and the historical superstructure, with the severest methods of critique, and to replace the old rotten beams by solid masonry quarried from the realities of life and joined so firmly as to bear the strain of doubt and the stress of research. I do not want laxity in matters of faith, but greater rigor and more earnestness; not indifference toward mooted problems, no agnostic shrug of the shoulder, but a higher assurance; not a surrender of the hope of religious certainty, but the gaining of a firmer ground; not the abolition of the ideals of the old orthodoxy, but the establishment of a new orthodoxy, a religion of scientifically tenable truth, a new Christianity, with a new God and one whose Christ is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Is the aim still too distant? There are some who do not as yet feel the need of an intellectual reform. They do not understand the present age and complain about the irreligious spirit of scientists and philosophers. But there are others who have been confronted with the problem; and they are the men who are able to judge whether or not our solution is right.

We need a more scientific conception of the Bible. Luther used to say, "The worst idols in the country are the pulpit and the sacrament"; he might have added a third, "the Bible." If we read the Bible with discretion, it will be found to be a source of blessings and to contain rich mines of wisdom, but an uncritical use of it, one which renders our judgment captive to the letter, will tend to enslave our mind and hinder the free unfoldment of our soul.

The present article is written to prove that we cannot regard the Bible as the word of God. But I wish our readers to remember that there is a reverse to the medal, which would be an exposition of the helpfulness of the Bible's religious ideals which do not lose their power by being coupled with human weaknesses and

shortcomings. It would lead us too far to enter upon the subject now, but those who have studied Professor Cornill's *Prophets of Israel* and the *History of the People of Israel* will not misinterpret the purpose of the present article.

The history of the world imposes new duties on every new generation. The truth is standing at the door and is knocking; shall we be afraid to let her in? The truth will change many things, but nothing that is of vital importance and if we have mistaken some incidentals for the essential thing, let us be corrected by the truth.

Science has taught us better methods of finding the truth than our ancestors possessed. Shall we shrink from using them in the religious field, where our convictions are more important, more significant, and of more practical and more sweeping application than in the domain of physics, chemistry, and electricity?

Let us hold fast to the idea that the truth is divine and we shall understand that science is a religious revelation. Science is the voice with which God speaks to mankind to-day, preparing a new dispensation which will sift tradition, keeping the good, discarding the bad, and, all in all, be in every respect superior to the dogmatism of the Middle Ages whose time is at last passing away.

EDITOR.